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Myspace.com and other social networking Web sites are smorgasbords for sexual predators hunting young victims, a suburban police detective warned Monday during a congressional hearing in Chicago.

"(Predators) are going to go where the children are," Naperville police detective Rich Wistocki said during the roughly 90-minute hearing at the Dirksen Federal Building.

Parents need to protect children online, Wistocki and other Internet-crime experts testified, by talking to them about possible Web dangers, getting their kids' computer passwords and setting usage rules.

U.S. Reps. Judy Biggert of Hinsdale and Mark Kirk of Highland Park, both Republicans, led the hearing. They primarily wanted to spread word of the perils these Web sites pose for kids.

Testifying with Wistocki were: Patricia Fix, chief of the Lake County state's attorney's high-technology crime unit; Sgt. Rick White of the Lake County sheriff's child exploitation unit, Mount Prospect police Investigator Robert Riordan, Libertyville-Vernon Hills Area High School District 128 Associate Superintendent Prentiss Lea and Northwest Suburban High School District 214 Associate Superintendent Mike Damyanovich.

While Fix, White and Riordan fight to put sex offenders behind bars, Damyanovich's district prohibits student access to social networking sites on campus.

Lea talked about his district's new policy that will punish students in extracurricular programs for depicting illegal or inappropriate behavior on the Internet.

Some witnesses shared disturbing stories about predators who've found suburban victims online. They do so, Fix said, with "staggering ease."

Representatives from myspace.com - one of several social networking Web sites - work more closely with authorities to stop predators than those from other companies, Wistocki said. The site also features a safety warning and tips for parents.

Even so, he and other witnesses who testified said the companies should do more to stop predators. Internet providers that don't keep records of online communications or require users to provide proof of identity or age make seducing kids even easier for criminals, Fix said.

Some children's online behavior doesn't help, either. Wistocki recounted a recent case in which a fifth-grader said she was 17 and posted lewd photos of herself online.

Kirk and Biggert also promoted legislation designed to increase online safety for children.

The Deleting Online Predators Act would require schools and libraries to limit youth access to social networking Web sites as well as obscene or pornographic sites. The legislation also calls upon the Federal Trade Commission to issue a consumer alert regarding the dangers of online predators and to create a Web site that would have information for parents, teachers and others about such dangers.

The legislation would help keep predators out of schools and libraries, but home protection still is up to parents, Biggert said.

"We need everyone to be educated," she said.

The full House could discuss the proposal in September, Kirk said.